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THE FIRST MESSIANIC PROPHECY

One of the sure marks of the God-breathed nature of Scripture is the way in which prophetic seed-thoughts are planted in its most ancient books, and are progressively unfolded in the centuries and millenniums that follow. The original prophecy may seem brief and even mysterious, but its final fulfillment, in all of its manifold aspects and ramifications, reflects back upon that original prophecy, and reveals those aspects which may never have been understood until they were fulfilled. Even as an acorn may seem utterly simple and insignificant to the casual observer, but every distinctive aspect of the great oak lies hidden within it, inviting the careful study of those who are thrilled at its final outcome.

The Pattern of All Prophecy

The very first prophecy of the Bible concerning the coming Redeemer of the world is no exception to this rule. In fact, it sets the pattern for all Bible prophecies. As we study Genesis 3:15, then, we learn not only that God knows all about the future, and that He planned from the beginning to send our Saviour into the world to defeat our arch-enemy Satan, but we also learn something of God's marvelous method of revealing such truths to ancient men for their hope and encouragement without at the same time confusing them with details they could never have understood.

The Prophecy Itself

For the sake of clarity, let us set forth a literal translation of the prophecy from the original Hebrew text, and arrange it in its three main parts: (1) "And enmity will I place between thee and the woman; (2) and between thy seed and her seed; (3) he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Who are the persons involved in this prophecy? A glance at the preceding verses of the chapter reveals that the *speaker* is none other than the Lord God; the *one spoken to* is the serpent, or rather, Satan behind the serpent, and the *woman* is Eve, "the mother of all living." One other person appears in the prophecy, of whom we shall speak shortly.

Satan and Eve

We must immediately dismiss as absurd the interpretation that this verse is just a continuation of the preceding verse and is therefore nothing more than a pronouncement of hatred and fear between human beings and serpents! How would this fit in with the tremendous solemnity of the occasion? How would the outcome hold forth any hope to this guilty pair? No; the

serpent as such is no longer in view in this verse, but rather "that old serpent" behind the animal, "called the devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). The main point of part 1 in the prophecy is this: God must put enmity between Satan and Eve, because her natural inclination as a sinner is to love sin and darkness. So God must teach her to hate the true enemy of her soul—not snakes, but *Satan*, the first murderer and the father of lies, as Christ described him (John 8:44). Thus, God breaks the false friendship between Satan and Eve and turns it into an enmity. This is the first token of God's grace to Eve.

Seed of Eve—Seed of Satan

Turning now to the second idea of the prophecy, we discover a new realm of thought. It is no longer Eve, but "her seed" which is seen to carry on the conflict, and the enemy is not only Satan now, but particularly Satan's "seed." What can these two seeds refer to? Franz Delitzsch gives us the answer: "The seed of the woman cannot be the entire human race, for Satan is a foe who can only be met with spiritual weapons, and none can defeat him apart from the possession of spiritual weapons. So the idea of 'the seed' is modified by the nature of the foe." The seed of the woman, then, must be the chosen race of *true believers*, culminating in Christ who is the head of that race. And the seed of Satan must therefore be unbelievers. Speaking to unbelievers of His day, our Lord said, "Ye are of your father the devil" (John 8:44; compare Matt. 23:33 and I John 3:8). When Cain slew Abel, he showed thereby that he "was of that wicked one" (I John 3:12), and was thus the first seed of Satan. When Eve gave birth to another son, she "called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew" (Gen. 4:25). So Abel was the first seed of the woman, and Seth the second.

Christ and Satan

The third part of the prophecy is the climax. Notice carefully that the seed of the woman suddenly narrows down from a chosen line, from a race of true believers to a single Person! "He shall bruise thy head." This is startling, and wonderfully significant! Looking back from the vantage point of fulfilled prophecy, we see clearly that this representative of the chosen race (Gal. 3:16), who delivered the deathblow to Satan's head, is none other than our Lord *Jesus Christ*, who died on the cross "that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). But in crushing the head of "that old serpent" at the cross, our Lord suffered the bruising of His own heel—the awful agony of bodily suffering that accompanied the crucifixion. This was Satan's supreme blow at God's Son—but it was not enough: Christ arose triumphant

from the grave! But Satan? "He shall bruise *thy head*." That was *fatal*. The cross *injured* Christ, but it *destroyed* Satan forever! He is a doomed creature (Rev. 20:2, 10).

The Effect of the Prophecy

Yes; the clear light of fulfillment wonderfully illumines that ancient prophecy for any who will ponder it today with the eye of faith. But what did it mean to Adam and Eve? Whatever else it meant to them, it meant at least this: (1) Instead of dying, the woman would live to have seed; (2) A warfare would begin between the false allies and Satan would be defeated by it; (3) Whereas it was through the woman that Satan enticed the human race into sin, so it would be through the woman that Satan would be destroyed. Perhaps the prophecy meant much more than this to them, but we do know that they *believed* God's prophecy, and acted upon it in faith. Thus it was that Adam immediately "called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living," and in response to this act of faith, "did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). The first prophecy was clear enough for Adam and Eve to believe and act upon. In effect, they trusted the coming Redeemer, and the clothing of animal skins signified the covering of their sins and the imputed righteousness of Christ.

The first Bible prophecy is thus a pattern for all that follow. It is simple in its form, and yet contains all the possibilities of its wonderful fulfillment. It is sufficient in its content to catch the imagination and kindle the faith of its first hearers, thus fulfilling an immediate, as well as an ultimate, purpose. And finally, it is directed toward a Person—the *only* Person toward whom all Bible prophecy moves as a mighty river. For, after all, it was as true in the Garden of Eden as it is today that faith in Christ as the Deliverer is God's only plan for the salvation of sinners.

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